Rage at Capitol assault makes excuses for summer riots all the more disgraceful

By Andy Ngo

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Protesters marched on the federal Justice Center on New Year's Eve in downtown Portland, Oregon.
REUTERS

Wednesday's mob assault on Capitol Hill was shocking and brazen: Hundreds of MAGA-hat-wearing rioters broke into the seat of American democracy. They stormed the halls, looting property and assaulting law enforcers, all in service of an absurd political demand: reversing the outcome of an election.

Now where had I witnessed such scenes before? The answer: in blue-governed cities in my native Pacific Northwestthroughout last summer and into the fall and winter.

The right-wing political violence was met with universal rebuke from politicians of both parties and the media. But many of those who are loudest in condemning the Capitol Hill riot went radio-silent when rioters destroyed and looted in the name of Black Lives Matter.

Last May, thousands of rioters in Minneapolis brought the city to its knees after the police-involved death of George Floyd. Over three days, rioters burned down a police station, looted hundreds of businesses and burned entire neighborhoods to the ground. Mass street violence also broke out in Washington, DC, New York City, Los Angeles, Seattle and dozens of other cities; at least two dozen died in the course of the riots.

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris encouraged her millions of Twitter followers to donate to a Minnesota crowd-funding effort that paid bail for accused rioters. So, too, did more than a dozen Joe Biden campaign staffers. The Minnesota Freedom Fund raked in more than $35 million in donations with their help.

In Portland, Ore., where I'm from, masked extremists from both BLM and Antifa smashed their way into the Multnomah County Justice Center on May 29. The building houses the Sheriff's Office, a police station and jail. Rioters ransacked the ground floor, hoping to break into the jail to free prisoners. When that failed, they started fires; city and county staff fled for their lives.

But the rioters were just getting started.

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For the next four months, BLM-Antifa rioted every night in Portland, setting fire to streets and buildings and assaulting responding officers with concrete and mortar explosives. In July, they tried to storm into a federal courthouse downtown. Night after night, hundreds and then thousands of rioters brought in electric tools, rope and explosives to breach the barrier erected to protect the building.

More than 277 injuries of officers were reported by the Department of Homeland Security in Portland alone. Hundreds of injuries were reported by other police departments in different cities.

Local politicians at the time condemned law enforcement and lionized the criminals. Portland city councilwoman Jo Ann Hardesty spread a conspiracy theory that police were engaging in false-flag arson attacks to frame left-wing protesters. Mayor Ted Wheeler told President Trump in a news conference to take his "troops" and leave. Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden called the officers an "occupying army." Oregon Gov. Kate Brown described them as "secret police abducting people in unmarked vehicles."

The media were no better.

In August, NPR gave an unchallenged platform to Vicky Osterweil to promote her book "In Defense of Looting." During the interview, the author argued that rioting and looting were legitimate acts of protest. Both local and national media rigidly only referred to the far-left rioters as "protesters." The Associated Press, which sets guidelines for journalists, amended its stylebook to discourage use of the word "riot," given protesters' "underlying grievances."

Hours after pro-Trump rioters stormed the Capitol, Antifa tried to break into the Multnomah County Courthouse in downtown Portland. A mob of black-clad Antifa militants proceeded to smash businesses and public buildings using hammers. On one wall, they spray-painted an Antifa logo and the warning, "The state can no longer suppress us."

Protesters then confronted Mayor Wheeler at a restaurant and hit him. But by morning, no national media had reported on the anti-government violence in Portland — the third riot in the city since New Year's Eve.

The upshot should be clear: The deadly storming of the Capitol building is the logical outcome of norms set by the left in 2020. By winking at and apologizing for Antifa, liberal elites telegraphed that political grievances ought to be resolved through violence.

Those showing righteous indignation now only months or weeks ago argued that the riots were "mostly peaceful" and that vandalism and looting don't count as violence.

That's the problem with political irresponsibility: Once the law grants quasi-authorization to hitherto-proscribed conduct, there's no telling how events might spiral.

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